



## *American Citizen Newsletter* *U.S. Consulate General Belfast*

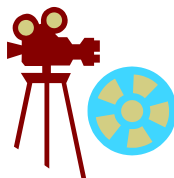
### **Dear American Community,**

The fall season is again upon us and as usual it looks to be a busy one for the Consulate. U.S. Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss will be over to participate in the all-party political talks in Scotland in October. We hope Northern Ireland's political leaders will seize this important opportunity to reach a lasting political settlement.

We are also looking forward to the premier of a TV documentary on the Consulate and its role in Northern Ireland. The documentary, which is scheduled to be shown on BBC Northern Ireland sometime in November, was filmed over the last year and focuses on the activities in which the Consulate has been engaged, from town hall meetings to alumni events to support for the peace process and building a shared future. I hope you will tune in.

Regards,

Dean Pittman  
Consul General



### **Department of State Begins Issuing Electronic Passports to the Public**

To enhance border security and to facilitate travel, the Department of State began issuing Electronic Passports (e-passports) to the public. Production has started at the Colorado Passport Agency and will be expanded to other production facilities over the next few months.

Consistent with globally interoperable specifications adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), this next generation of the U.S. passport includes biometric technology. A contactless chip in the rear cover of the passport will contain the same data as that found on the biographic data page of the passport (name, date of birth, gender, place of birth, dates of passport issuance and expiration, passport number), and will also include a digital image of the bearer's photograph.

The Department of State has employed a multi-layered approach to protect the privacy of the information and to mitigate the chances of the electronic data being skimmed (unauthorized reading) or eavesdropped (intercepting communication of the transmission of data between the chip and the reader by

unintended recipients). Metallic anti-skimming material incorporated into the front cover and spine of the e-passport book prevents the chip from being skimmed, or read, when the book is fully closed; Basic Access Control (BAC) technology, which requires that the data page be read electronically to generate a key that unlocks the chip, will prevent skimming and eavesdropping; and a randomized unique identification (RUID) feature will mitigate the risk that an e-passport holder could be tracked. To prevent alterations to or modification of the data on the chip, and to allow authorities to validate and authenticate the data, the information on the chip will include an electronic signature (PKI).

The Department of State is confident that the new e-passport, including biometrics and other improvements, will take security and travel facilitation to a new level.

For more information about the Electronic Passport, please visit the Bureau of Consular Affairs' website at [http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/eppt/epptnew\\_2807.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/eppt/epptnew_2807.html).



### **Being Prepared for UK – U.S. Travel**

Following the announcement by UK and U.S. law enforcement authorities of an alleged plot to bomb U.S.-bound flights from UK airports, security restrictions at UK and U.S. airports were tightened. Security information as of September 26, 2006 is as follows:

For flights originating in the UK, the British Airport Authority (BAA) states that, per the directive from the UK Department of Transport ([www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)), passengers are permitted to carry ONE item of cabin baggage through the airport security search point. The cabin bag should be no bigger than 56cm long x 45cm wide x 25cm deep (22in x 17.5in x 9.85in.), including wheels, handles, side pockets. Airlines may restrict size further. We therefore advise you to contact your airline.

All items carried by passengers will be x-ray screened. Hand baggage must not contain liquids, gels, pastes, lotions or aerosols of any description. Exceptions to this are prescribed medicines in liquid form (e.g. diabetic medicine) and baby milk and liquid baby food (the contents of each bottle must be tasted by parent). Electronic equipment, including laptops, mobile phones and portable music and DVD players will be screened and allowed on board.

At UK airports, before security, all shops and catering outlets are open to all passengers. Any liquids and gels you purchase must be packed into your luggage for check-in and any other purchases must fit into your hand luggage. Once through security, all shops and catering outlets are open to all passengers. If you are traveling to any destination outside the USA, you may take all items purchased in the departures lounge onto the aircraft cabin. If you are traveling to the USA, passengers will be subjected to secondary security searches at the gate. No liquids purchased in the departure lounge will be allowed into the aircraft cabin and any drinks or liquids must be

consumed before boarding. Food, however, is allowed. Visit [www.baa.com](http://www.baa.com) for more details and links to the airports BAA administers: Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Southampton. For information on Northern Ireland airports, see websites for Belfast International Airport, [www.belfastairport.com](http://www.belfastairport.com); George Best Belfast City Airport, [www.belfastcityairport.com](http://www.belfastcityairport.com); and Derry City Airport [www.cityofderryairport.com](http://www.cityofderryairport.com).

As of September 26, 2006, for international flights originating in the U.S. and for U.S. domestic flights, the U.S. Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) has stated that travelers may carry through security checkpoints travel-size toiletries (3 ounces or less) that fit comfortably in ONE, QUART-SIZE, clear plastic, zip-top bag. At the checkpoint travelers will be asked to remove the zip-top bag of liquids and place it in a bin or on the conveyer belt. X-raying separately will allow TSA security officers to more easily examine the declared items. Further information on permitted liquid items, as well as an extensive list of prohibited items, can be found at: [http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/editorial\\_1012.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/editorial_1012.shtm).

Passengers may now bring beverages and other items purchased in the secure boarding area onboard aircraft.

Laptop computers, cellular phones, iPods, and other portable electronic devices are still allowed on board an aircraft. These items must be screened at the security checkpoint. Some solid or powdered cosmetics items are permitted

past security checkpoints; however, this is left to the discretion of the TSA. To minimize delays, TSA recommends that you pack all cosmetics in your checked baggage. For more details, go to <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtm>.

## Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires that by January 1, 2008, travelers to and from the Caribbean, Bermuda, Panama, Mexico and Canada have a passport or other secure, accepted document to enter or re-enter the United States.

In the proposed implementation plan, which was subject to a period of initial public comment, the Initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline will be as follows:

- **January 8, 2007** – Requirement applied to all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Bermuda.
- **January 1, 2008** – Requirement extended to all land border crossings as well as air and sea travel.

This is a change from prior travel requirements and will affect all United States citizens entering the United States from countries within the Western Hemisphere who do not currently possess valid passports. This new requirement will also affect certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States. Most Canadian citizens, citizens of the British Overseas

Territory of Bermuda, and to a lesser degree, Mexican citizens will be affected by the implementation of this requirement.

For more information, go to [http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc\\_2223.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html)

### **Fact Sheet: Avian Influenza A (H5N1) and Pandemic Influenza**

The State Department has completely updated and revised its avian influenza fact sheet and FAQ's. Both are available on-line at

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health\\_1181.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_1181.html) .

The fact sheet alerts Americans to the Department of State's preparedness efforts with respect to a possible influenza pandemic. The fact sheet emphasizes that, in the event of a pandemic, the Department of State's ability to assist Americans traveling and residing abroad may be severely limited by restrictions on local and international movement imposed for public health reasons, either by foreign governments and/or the United States. Furthermore, American citizens should take note that the Department of State cannot provide Americans traveling or living abroad with medications or supplies even in the event of a pandemic.

The fact sheet directs readers to a variety of websites related to U.S. government planning efforts, travel-related information and prevention, response and treatment information.



### **Voting - Mid-Term Elections**

U.S. Citizens overseas are guaranteed the right to vote in federal elections in the United States. Please note that you cannot simply log on to a website and vote at the last minute. Almost all states require voters to send in registration documents, receive paper ballots by return post, and mail in their completed ballots. Adequate preparation is key!

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website provides extensive information for overseas voter, including state and monthly election calendars, links to on-line registration and an Absentee Ballot request form and state-by-state instructions. Go to <http://www.fvap.gov> for further details.

Another useful on-line resource is the Overseas Vote Foundation (OVF) at: <http://www.overseasvotefoundation.org>. OVF's mission is to facilitate and increase participation of American overseas voters and military voters and their dependents in federal elections by providing public access to voter registration tools and services.

### **Veterans Affairs – Information Recovered**

Veteran's Affairs Secretary R. James Nicholson, announced on June 29, 2006, that law enforcement agents recovered the laptop and external hard drive that was stolen from a VA employee in May.

The FBI has since informed VA that it has completed its forensic examination of the recovered laptop and hard drive. The FBI indicated to VA that it has a high degree of confidence -- based on the results of the forensic tests and other

information gathered during the investigation -- that the sensitive files were not accessed or compromised.

Given the FBI's high degree of confidence that the information was not compromised, individual credit monitoring will not be necessary. However, VA has obtained data breach analysis services as a means of further ensuring no misuse of this data occurs in the future. Data breach analysis is used to detect patterns of misuse related to a specific data loss incident. While it is highly unlikely that the data was accessed, data breach analysis will provide back-up assurances.

In addition, we encourage all service members and veterans to be extra vigilant and carefully monitor their financial records. For information on how to protect yourself against identity theft, please visit the Federal Trade Commission's Web site ([www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft)) or call 1-877-438-4338. You can obtain a free credit report, once a year, by contacting one of the three major credit bureaus – Equifax, Experian, TransUnion by calling 001-877-322-8228.

For further information on Veteran's Affairs, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).



### **New Rules for Obtaining a Social Security Number and Card**

Recent provisions in law have changed the rules for assigning a Social Security

number and issuing a Social Security card. All documents must be either originals or copies certified by the issuing agency. We cannot accept photocopies or notarized copies of documents. At <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10120.html> you can view the fact sheet that gives the most up-to-date information available on the requirements for applying for a Social Security number and card.

### **Social Security Numbers and U.S. Passport Applications**

When applying for a new U.S. passport or renewing your existing one, 26 USC 6039E requires that applicants provide their correct social security number in box number 5 of the passport application form DS-11/DS-82. If a person does not have a social security number, he/she should enter 0's in the box. This information is shared with the Internal Revenue Service in relation to Resident Status. Applicants who fail to provide a valid social security number can be "subject to a penalty equal to \$500.00 for each such failure, unless it is shown that such failure is due to reasonable cause and not to willful neglect." Although the Department of State cannot deny issuance of a passport on the grounds that a person does not want to provide a social security number, the IRS intends to enforce the penalty.

### **New Rules for Taxation of Social Security**

The new U.S.-UK tax treaty has changed how U.S. social security payments are taxed. This is important for residents of the United Kingdom. Article 17,



Paragraph 3 states that U.S. social security shall be taxable only in the United Kingdom. In other words, it is not reported on the United States tax return, but rather on the United Kingdom tax return. There is one exception to this rule. (Since we are talking about tax law, we are lucky there is only one exception!) As many of you know, the United Kingdom has a remittance rule. That is, if an individual is domiciled elsewhere and the money is not remitted to the United Kingdom, then it is not taxable in the United Kingdom. So, if under the remittance rule, the U.S. social security payments are not taxable in the UK, then they would be taxable in the United States. This makes sense: the treaty was never intended to create a situation where the US social security benefits were taxable in neither country. For further information on this and other tax issues, visit the IRS page of the U.S. Embassy website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/index.htm>.

### **Electronic Visa Application Form (EVAF) Mandatory from November 1, 2006**

Effective **November 1, 2006**, U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide will only be able to accept visa application forms (DS-156) that have been completed “electronically” using the bar-coded on-line application form. Please ask friends and family that may need to apply for a non-immigrant visa to be sure to review our Visa Services information on <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/ni-visa.html>.



### **Visa Waiver Program & Passports**

As of October 26, 2006, any passport **issued on or after this date** by a Visa Waiver Program (VWP) country must be an e-Passport for VWP travelers to be eligible to enter the United States without a visa. For more information, go to the Department of Homeland Security website at [http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/content\\_multi\\_image/content\\_multi\\_image\\_0021.xml](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/content_multi_image/content_multi_image_0021.xml) or go to [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without\\_1990.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/without/without_1990.html) for Visa Waiver Travel.

If a friend or family member has a question as to whether their British or Irish passport meets the requirements for visa waiver travel, please contact the local British or Irish passport office or the nearest British or Irish Embassy or Consulate.

### **Culture Corner**

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. In this quarter, we encourage you to check out:

***Belfast Festival at Queens - October 19 – November 18, 2006: The “Through Our Eyes” Project*** – is a new, international exchange exhibition involving artists from Northern Ireland and New York who will work with a

variety of media including painting, photographs and sculpture. **Venue:** Metro Building, 6-9 Donegal Street South, Belfast.



**October 24 - 25, 2006, Stephen**

**Petronio Dance: Bud**

**Suite/Bloom/Lareigne** – The evocative signature movement of choreographer Stephen Petronio combines with the poetic surge of singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright. Fellow collaborators in these pieces are resident lighting designer Ken Tabachnick with costumes by Tara Subkoff. **Venue:** Stranmillis College Theatre, Belfast.

For further information on both of these events, go to [www.belfastfestival.com](http://www.belfastfestival.com) or phone 02890 90971034.

## Consulate Closure Dates

The Consulate will be closed on the following dates:

**Monday, October 9, 2006 – Columbus Day**

**Friday, November 10, 2006 - Veteran's Day**

**Thursday, November 23, 2006 - Thanksgiving Day**

**Monday, December 25, 2006 and**

**Tuesday, December 26, 2007 - Christmas Day & Boxing Day**

**Monday, January 1, 2006 – New Year's Day**

## Other Items of Interest

### **American Ex-Pats Website**

A website for ex-pats living and working in Ireland has been organized by an American living in Northern Ireland. For information, go to

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/US\\_EX\\_PATS\\_LIVING\\_IN\\_IRELAND/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/US_EX_PATS_LIVING_IN_IRELAND/)

### **The Ulster American Women's Club**

**(UAWC)** is looking to increase its membership! For more than 20 year the UAWC has sought to foster and encourage friendship and social and cultural activities among American women living in the province. Upcoming topics to be discussed are a Tour of Stormont in October and the Annual Thanksgiving Pot-luck Dinner. If you are interested in more information about the organization, please contact Patricia French at

[pmfwatercolours@hotmail.com](mailto:pmfwatercolours@hotmail.com).

## Contact Information

### **American Citizen Services:**

**02890-386104**

For all other inquires, please contact our office via email:

[consularbelfast@state.gov](mailto:consularbelfast@state.gov)

**In the case of a life or death emergency of an American Citizen, the out-of-hours phone number is 0870- 2385428.**